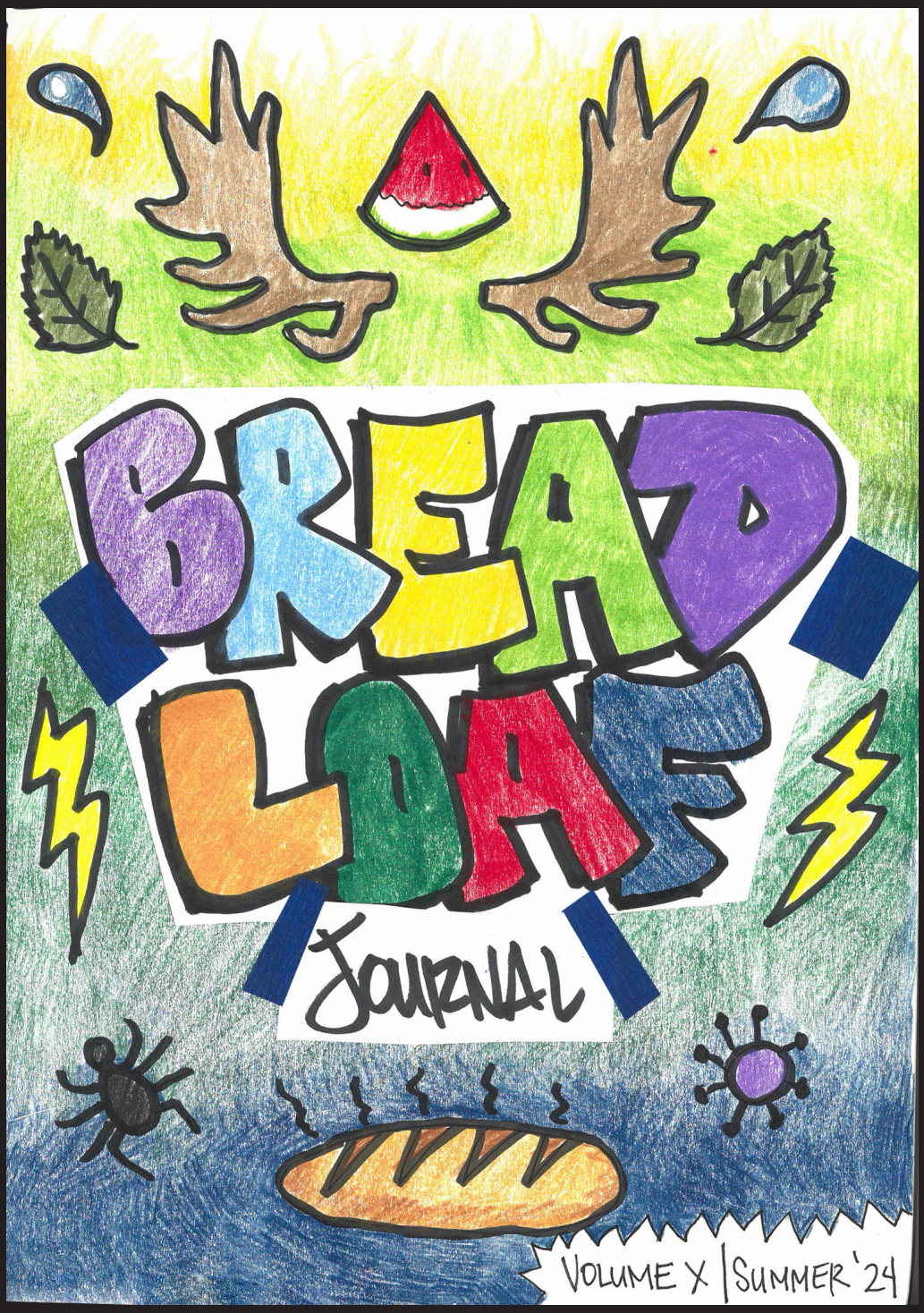
THE BREAD LOAF JOURNAL

VOLUME X | SUMMER 2024



THE BREAD LOAF JOURNAL

VOLUME X | SUMMER 2024

WRITINGS FROM THE SCHOOL OF ENGLISH

Cover art: Serena Kim
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Middlebury Bread Loaf
School *of* English

2024 Bread Loaf Journal

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Opening remarks:

This collection is amazing and rich—I mean that without hyperbole—qualities that are no feat of your coeditors. Rather, they are the direct result of a diverse array of exceptional writing, plus a handful of images, from a diverse array of exceptional writers and creators. By heeding the call for submissions, through these pages the contributors bring us everywhere—into the reaches of the cosmos, into profound self-discovery, profound discovery of others, and on, and on—exploring the human condition, identity, pathos, cohesion, disparateness, and all that literature does for humankind.

You will leave these pages thinking and feeling in new ways. Indeed, the works herein bear the most vaunted of qualities: they offer something new and valuable upon reading after reading after reading. Thus, having enjoyed the pleasure of these pages multiple times, I humbly yet insistently invite you to do the same. With gratitude to every person who submitted work, I look forward to continually returning to the sustenance of these pages as recreation, as enrichment, and as a return to the magic we create on the mountain, by the sea, and among the ivied walls of Turl Street.[1]

—Louis G. Smith '24, Coeditor

[1] With apologies for the anodyne and generic nature of the nonetheless heartfelt comments above, the following also bears noting: following the night of June 30th, even while under the fortifying and visible protection of incredible allies and supporters, I slept for the remainder of the summer with a hammer next to the bed, windows and doors locked up tight.

The Pole

COZA PERRY | OXFORD

The first time I moved a clip, I lifted the pole to find the right name and the clip got stuck in my hair. Kids laughed. I laughed. I forgot whose clip I was moving. We trudged on with the lesson.

The pole was a quarter-inch wooden dowel, about four feet long, wrapped in thick stripes of green, yellow, orange, and red electrical tape. Each student had their name written on a clothespin that clipped to the pole. Every day, clips started on green. We teachers were to carry the pole at all times, moving clips down for undesirable behavior like not getting to work fast enough, talking out of turn, or getting up without asking. If students moved to red, we were supposed to call home. Clips did not move back up, until the next day.

During staff training, we were told that the pole led to academic success by implementing "high, clear expectations." The goal was to achieve 100% compliance—every single kid doing *exactly* what you asked them to, exactly when you asked. Notably, the trainers did not have 100% of the audience's attention.

As a first-year teacher I received weekly feedback. I was excited to improve my lessons. Instead, my feedback was always about the pole.

"I noticed you moved Elijah's clip for talking, but not Serenity's. Why is that?"

"Well, Serenity shouted an answer because she was excited. Elijah called me a bitch."

"In order to be consistent, we move clips based on specific behaviors. The problem isn't what they said, but that they said anything at all. We're really looking for that 100%. You should have moved both clips."

"Calling me a bitch and shouting out an answer are the same level of 'undesirable behavior?'"

"If we're training the scholars for success, yes."

I felt like a drill sergeant, but being a consummate rule follower, I continued trying to wield the pole successfully. Students called me out every single time.

"I whispered yesterday and you didn't move my clip then."

"You didn't say specifically that I shouldn't rip the paper."

"They were passing notes too, how come they're not in trouble?"

At least half of my daily interactions with students were about the pole,

and not about learning. I stopped using it. This was not popular with my observer. She arranged for a behavior-management trainer to sit in the back of my classroom, speaking directions into a headpiece while I wore an earbud and tried to follow them.

"Move Braedon's clip; he's talking."

I nodded. "Braedon, you're on yellow."

"You can't just tell him he's on yellow. He needs to see it—physically *move* the clip."

Braedon's clip was not on the pole. It had probably fallen off somewhere or been stolen (kids thought stealing their clips was hilarious). I moved a different clip and hoped the trainer wouldn't notice.

Students at our school often exhibited intense behaviors: fighting, emptying recycling bins on desks, putting glue in teachers' coffee. Many teachers used the pole as a security blanket in a vain attempt to garner control, clutching it to their chests white-knuckled, moving clips with a shaky voice. Other teachers carried the pole around like a conductor's baton. They'd declare clip-moves proudly, chin held high, believing their quiet and submissive classroom was a model for excellence. I wondered if students were learning much in either environment—kids can't focus in chaos, but terrified children don't ask questions.

Some of us chose neither path. During one staff meeting, a colleague whispered, "here we go with that god-forsaken pole." Another nodded while rolling her eyes. I'd found my people. We began a small but elite pole rebellion—our poles spent the day leaning idly against our desks until they needed to be handed off. We were often met with eye rolls and exasperated sighs when other teachers saw an entire class on green, but no one had the energy to report us. Since we were no longer first-year teachers we were rarely observed, allowing our revolt to go unnoticed by administration.

We never explicitly told the students that we hated the pole, but they knew. Kids who frequently wound up on red in other classrooms found reasons to spend extra time in ours. They'd ask to stay in from recess or eat lunch with us. They'd linger after dismissal, asking questions about our lives and telling us about theirs. We called them "the lost boys." One of my favorite lost boys was Caleb. He was the size of a kindergartener, but he spoke like a crabby grandpa. He volunteered to take the class pet home over breaks by saying "yo miss can I take them damn fishes home?"

One afternoon, Caleb returned from music class grumbling, head down, squeaking the linoleum with his sneakers. He'd been moved to red for talking out of turn.

"Miss! It's not fair! He didn't even move me to yellow first, he went straight to red! No wonder everyone hates that stupid class! I wasn't the only one talking. That teacher doesn't like me."

Caleb had an abundance of energy. It was impossible for him to be silent or sit still. Mr. Jones was trying to do his job, which was to teach music to a silent, still classroom. That damn pole pitted everyone against each other.

"I'm sorry that happened, Caleb. I'm sure you and Mr. Jones can work it out later. He wants music to be fun and safe for everyone, you included."

Caleb was unconvinced. The other students chimed in with a chorus of "no miss, Mr. really does hate him" and "it actually *was* unfair" and "I even told him I was talking too, and he ignored it."

"Ok everyone. Let's get started and we can problem-solve later."

I walked over to my desk, leaning the pole against it as usual. Caleb followed me.

"Do you need something, bud?"

He shook his head no, then kicked the pole as hard as he could. "Fuck that pole!" he exclaimed.

It flew up in the air in an arc and smacked into a bookshelf. Clips rained from the sky and scattered themselves across the floor. The class stared at me, awaiting a response. I left the mess where it was, and started the lesson.

Another 'I am' poem

JAMIE WILBER | VERMONT

I am aloe vera and tea tree oil
long bike rides and hikes in the woods
I am camping in tents and cooking over a fire
and toilets among trees built by dad
I am rolling down hills and running alongside dogs
I am belly rubs and kittens purring,
7 rabbits, 2 goats, some chickens, and a horse named Clyde
I am learning to cook breakfast on a plastic stove
I am ghost stories and Are You Afraid of the Dark?
I am pillow forts and hide and seek
I am birthday parties during hunting season,
car crashes
and slaughtered deer hanging from a clothesline
I am stacking chopped firewood and complaining about it
I am whiffleball to softball to basketball to ultimate frisbee
I am TVs in every room of the house
I am naps on the couch to naps on the beach
I am Coors Light to craft beers to wine with ice
I am tulips and tea bags
I am my mom more than my dad
I am my dad more than my mom
I am back pain inherited
I am grandchild of an Irish orphan, alone in America
of manic depressive bipolar disorder and suicide in a silver Buick
I am hippies turned Republicans,
war veterans and husbands who cheat
I am Catholic prayers and Protestant churches and agnosticism
I am second-hand smoke and snowball fights
I am Terry, Barbara, Jamie, and Chris on holiday cards,
and Mark, a half-sibling, always left out
I am drunken fights and locked doors and empty threats of divorce
I am too many gifts on Xmas and a spoiled brat the rest of the year
I am introverted and extroverted,

oldest child and middle child,
sister, niece, aunt and cousin
and uncles who don't speak
I am Bisquick pancakes and food coloring in milk,
all the cheeses on everything, but never bleu, never American
I am haircuts in the kitchen
I am an accident waiting to happen
I am choosing to be more than my family history
I am just getting starting
I am I am I am

The Long Trail

ANGELA JONES | OXFORD

I stop to rest while hiking the Long Trail

A woman says, *I like your earrings*
They are the shape of the mother continent, cut like raw obsidian
I hesitated to wear them, but figured, black goes with everything,
even the New England wilderness

The woman asks if I've ever been there

Yes, I say, *with my sister a few weeks ago* *We traveled there for the first time*
The woman tells me she has been *many times*
She's gone on Safari, *of course*, and
I also do charity work in Zimbabwe and South Africa
Did you go there on Safari, or for charity? she asks
Not knowing how to answer, I lie *A little of both, I guess*?

If I were honest, I would say
my sister and I went because it was on a short list of places in the world
that promised not to be violent toward black women tourists
Because we needed to feel less alien in our own skin
We went because, even though our DNA breakdown on Ancestry.com–

the eugenics-y database created by the Mormon Church; devotees of
Vermonter Joseph Smith

–didn't mention Tanzania, it was still a place we thought we could do some
healing
from the wounds of growing up BlackGirlsInAmerica

And it was
because Callisa, the barber in Zanzibar who cut my hair
has a name that means beautiful
And because Gloria, the shop owner in Arusha who sold me the earrings

asked me not to cut my hair, because my locs were valuable
Tanzanians would pay a lot of money *to have what you have*, she said

Please don't cut them

My sister said, *Of course we'd have to come here to realize there was any value in our hair*
Everyone there only ever told us how worthless it was.

But I still cut them, because there was too much America locked up in
them
But I still kept them, because how could I sell a part of me worth so much

Gasper, who had a farm, a wife, and a new baby girl in Dar es Salaam
said, before talking to us, he never considered he might be lucky
to have been born in Africa, instead of America

I don't say any of this to the woman on the Long Trail
who does charity work in Zimbabwe and South Africa

Instead, I do what I've come to the mountain to do
I lay back and enjoy the sunlight peeking through the canopy
and the breeze brushing the nape of my neck
where there used to hang heavy, heavy locs of American hair

[I Take a Walk in the Park Still Raging, or Who The Hell is You]

TIMOTHY REE | OXFORD

Nee-gah noo-goon-dae just saying Nee-gah noo-goo-nya / noo-goo-nee don't matter Nee-gah noo-goo / noo-goo jee-mahn

years ago Nee-gah noo-goo yut-jee-mahn / I mean the history of black bound history of white / Nuh-yee-gah noo-goon-dae

because for now I'm not trying to translate shit for any of you / nuh-yee-deul had / but one job one tongue in the jaw-jabber

January to June strumming the bluest blue chords / barring the same frets / the ones swarming the border, for example, O

poor replaceable you. And we? Oori-neun noo-goon-dae / saying Oori-gah noo-goo yut-jee-mahn / years ago to survive / noo-goo-rahng hahp-chun-neun-dae as in collusion all / of us here my brothers & sisters no shade from these truths / the sun be up

now & I am me / nuh-neun nuh-da meaning / what I mean you feel me? Moo-jee / ah-joo / uhm-chung / dae-bahk / to all

these degrees. Now my forearm a shark fin leading between trees / avoiding the sheen of early morning webs / as they too need

to beast don't they that spider hunger / a squirrel skittered up the bark / I can tell by the pitch of claws over hollow wood /

this one sucked dead skinny brittle by lantern flies / Nee-gah noo-goon-dae because / Nee-gah ahn-moo-ruh-bwat-jee-mahn

& what / because we been moo-jee ignored / ah-joo invisible rage raging uhm-chung son / because my words have always been

unsolicited / dae-bahk savvy now to mix it up / a spotted hawk swoops by accusing me my gab & loiter / I too am not a bit

tamed / bet / I shall be good to you nonetheless. Hurry the trail toward an old splintered bench. I'll be here waiting for you.

To the Glory Days of Outer Space, Adieu

ALEX SILVA | VERMONT

i. mercury

I come from
ostentatious obstacle
and lots of *look at me* energy
family photos
full of dark matter
spring dresses and suit coats
spiral in the mix

ii. venus

I come from
tremendous trouble
sitting still, all
supernova glow,
rosy-cheeked & Portobello bowl-cut
like a helmet full of milkyway dreams
of TV outer space

iii. earth

I come from
strange streets
coy as neighborhood boys
ribcage razor thin & glass-bottle smash
high-speed space trash
who borrow bicycles before dinner
but never bring them back

iv. mars

I come from
failed focus

blasting off like Cape Canaveral
plum knees and Maraschino-red
young asthmatic dreamer
martian dust at recess
scatters through the schoolyard

v. jupiter

I come from
capricious conversation
you must clear your plate at dinner
chestnut-eyes and bruised-blue
tessellations which
could swallow every pale dot
way up in the sky

vi. saturn

I come from
covert condescension
covered up by slamming screen doors
wire thin & punched-through
gathering in the cul-de-sac
to congregate
like storms of meteors

vii. uranus

I come from
grandma's good graces
kaleidoscopic love
stained like church glass
cleared for takeoff but
the lack of gravity still feels
like falling in your chest

viii. neptune

I come from
milk crates bodega bright
grapefruits gorged like red giants
corner-store fruit flies & vanilla light
one small step for man
into a tenant's lot that might not
be here come the fall

ix. what was pluto

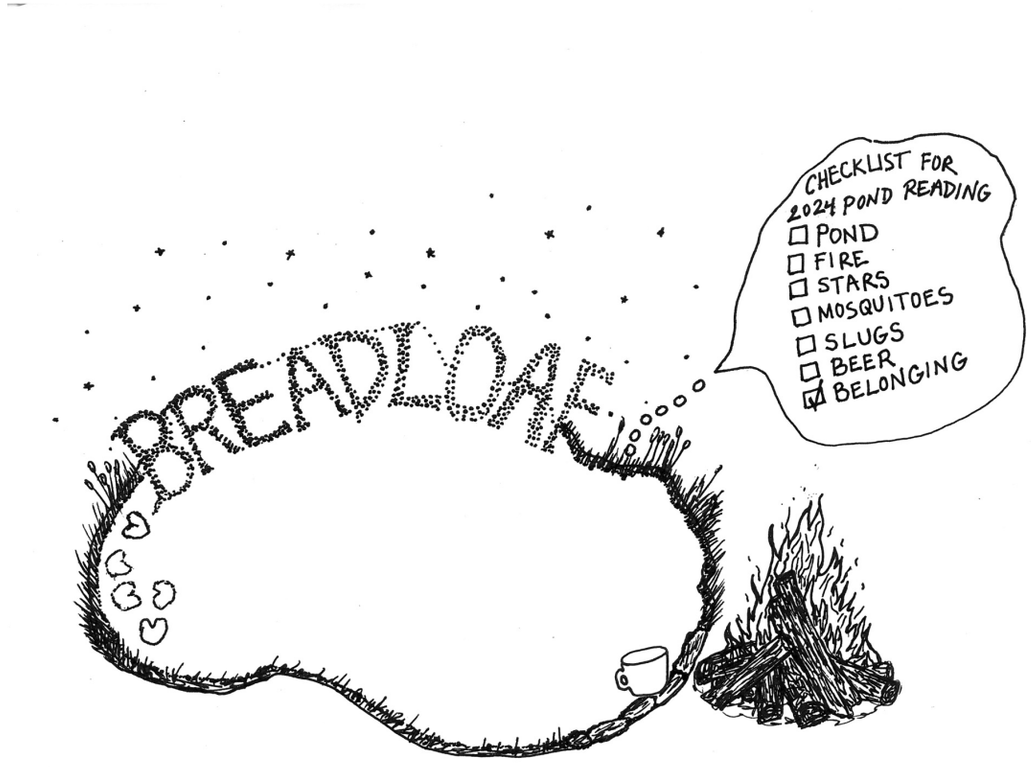
I come from
empty expectation
bowls of stems and rinds and guilt
cloudy gin & lucid envy
tethered to a melody
haunted humming
so many rooms away

x. beyond

I come from
upset understanding
that some missions don't leave planning
chapped-lips & furrowed brow
assurance to the thinking
there are frontiers
beyond this one

Pond Reading Checklist 2024

JAMIE WILBER | VERMONT



Regrets?

KATHARINE IZARD | ONLINE

I regret not having the courage to say yes
when the bagpiper
who visited in 5th grade
asked me if I wanted to try
after I asked if it was hard to play

I regret not wearing sunscreen on my back
when the boy I liked asked me to the pool in 8th grade
I was too nervous to ask him to help me
I thought it too sexual of an act

I regret not kissing him on my seventeenth birthday

I regret plucking the tiny white hairs leading up to my belly button
(and to be completely honest around my nipples too)
they were harmless and no one would have ever noticed them
now I do
and I'm forced to be high maintenance
keeping track of tiny insignificant hairs
because I hate how the hairs appear now

I regret shaving my pubic hair freshman year of college
when I had to wear a white leotard for a performance
I scratched my crotch like a fuckboy for three weeks straight
thankfully I had enough sense not to shave it again
trapping myself for eternity in itch

I regret convincing a friend one summer day in Charleston
to hike around a swamp
when it was 110 degrees with 100 percent humidity
there was a reason no one else was there

but most of all I regret not learning from that experience
and failing to wear bug spray today
it just finished storming and the mosquitoes
find my calves too easily

so, I regret not taking care of myself
in the small ways
because it's those small avoidances
that become big nuisances.

Clementine

NICK MILLER | VERMONT

He held the rock. Left thumb below the crest, resting in the notch that held bravely above the bulging, smooth base that held the rest together, right thumb and fingers and palm caressing something lovely.

———————

"Darling, there is a rock atop the dresser."
"Darling, I love you, but why is there a rock atop the dresser?"
"Darling, can we please move the rock atop the dresser?"
> "No, Darling, I would never move the rock atop the dresser while you were gone. I don't know why it is a little to the left."

"Yes, Darling, I remember the day you put the rock atop the dresser."

———————

"Doctor, do people die of typhoid?"
"Doctor, does it hurt to die of typhoid?"
"Doctor, will she cry when she dies?"
The bed lay empty now and with the shovel in his hand he dug into the November earth and found a shallow burrow of rabbits frozen in the early frost of the night. He threw down his shovel and fell back into the empty bed to writhe and feel the tears begin to soak through the linen where they had laid. He found a handkerchief and wrapped the rabbits in it, resting them atop her coffin where the melted frost would soak through the fabric and into the wood as his tears had done to the linen.
People do cry when they die of typhoid.

———————

The town had a store in it, and in the store there was a girl who did the arithmetic at the front. She was alone always and men did come calling and she did not answer to any for she was widowed and thought that it was both wrong and awful lonely to love again and so she did not love again for some time until a farmer with sad eyes came in and told her that he needed flour and

thread and thimble and when she asked why he was the one doing the sewing he nearly cried. Days and nights passed, and the farmer came in to buy flower bulbs.
And he looked at her hair.
And then he bought lamp oil.
And he looked at her eyes.
And then he bought fruit.
And then he looked at her chest.

———————

She lit the lamp and she caressed the flowers with a hand that still dripped with juice, undressing, and looked at his tired eyes and frame and the suspenders that strained taut in the caverns of his back and shoulders and the fingers that each could hold days and nights and stars and mountains, scooping them all up gently and with a fine, earnest grace.
"Yes I have come in for something." He had said.
"Yes I am forgetful." He had said.
"Yes I am a widow." He had said.
"Yes you may visit the horses if you like." He had said.
He had given her all the fruit.
And now he held a rock that had sat atop his dresser where she had put the dish of peach and cherry pits before he moved it swiftly and quietly away to the bedside.
He held the rock. Left thumb below the crest, resting in the notch that held bravely above the bulging, smooth base that held the rest together, right thumb and fingers and palm caressing something lovely.
The door was still open, and he carried the rock out the door and she watched him trudge through the window as he went down to the forest and disappeared.
She was cold.
"Yes she was very lovely." He had said.
"Yes I loved her very much." He had said.
"She made me glad to be living." He had said.
"Typhoid." He had said.
She watched him walk into the forest, her chest cold and bare in the fading light.

———————

The water tumbled over the earth like an altar. A wide altar.
He held the rock.
He held the rock. Left thumb below the crest, resting in the notch that held bravely above the bulging, smooth base that held the rest together, right thumb and fingers and palm caressing something lovely.
And the rock held him back as he bent over and felt himself wrap around it, swaying him, holding him.
The rock was warm as it helped him down into and below the gentle altar, into the forever cold,
warm for longer than forever, soothing him to the music of the falling water and the people's song she became.

———————

In the cavern
In the canyon
Excavating for our mine
Dwelt a miner, forty niner
And his darling
Clementine
Excavated, joy elated
Pulled some topaz,
From the mine,
There is a rock atop the dresser.
But no darling, Clementine.
Oh my darling
Oh my darling
Oh my darling, Clementine
You are lost and gone forever
Dreadful sorry
Clementine
And now the farmer
Held the warm rock
Feeling lonely all the time
May God hold her, as he told her
When she coughed, and wrenched her spine
Oh my darling
Oh my darling

Oh my darling, Clementine
You are lost and gone forever
Dreadful sorry
Clementine

———————

He held the rock.
He held the rock forever.

Scenic Route

SAM CLARK | VERMONT

I say it's the weather, and joking that
I'm not technically a Southern man,
I leave out the subtle detail
That there's also no AC here, just a flimsy fan.

But it's more than the briefest escape
From the heat of my too-red purple state.
Watching thunder rattle the windows,
I think, what brings me back, besides fate?

Perhaps it's the commitment to the prose and poems
And finally putting away my phone to really see.
It's the sunsets that never cease to amaze
And the porch conversations where we can just be.

This place is a retreat from the regular
From teaching, chaperoning, coaching:
Where the stars are bright and only dimmed
By the bonfire smoke and voices rising.

I say it's the weather, and sure that's true
But now it's also about being here with you.

in honor of nana

VICTORIA PEREZ | OXFORD

sun-smiling roses
engrave my right calf
planted, rooted in my heart
thornless stems growing past

medicated moans
muttered last words
nurses buzzing by her bed

her spirit lasts

marmalade painted lady
french-tipped petals
apricot lips
she drank nectar
from every flower she met

she pollinated love
in birdsong birthday cards, told us to be strong

even when her wings became weak
she cocooned us with silk thread arms

4-8-24

ETHAN MCBEE | VERMONT

The old instructor gave up long ago
On using the cardinal directions
With his class. He walked outside
The laughter over the safety lecture,
The jokes about going blind.

But as they turned skyward
Like parched turkeys desperate for rain
They placed their faith in
Bulk order flimsy cardboard and
Science they didn't understand.

For just today,
For the rest of their lives,
They would remember
Where the sun sat in the sky.

Hot-Mess Harriet

MICHAEL O'CONNOR | VERMONT

Here's exactly what goes down
When Hot-Mess Harriet is around.

Pencils snap and bookshelves quake.
Toys for show-and-tell all break.

Margot always starts to cry
'Cause now there's glue up in her eye.

The markers all are missing caps.
The book covers all have torn-up flaps.

She sprints on by with opened scissors.
If she was gone, no one would miss her.

A menace, a nut. She's completely mad!
She spat on every kid's sketch pad.

Now she's climbing on the desks
And looking at answers to the test.

Never has she hung her coat
Or washed her hands or taken a note.

A one-girl wrecking crew she is.
I saw her cheat on today's math quiz.

For Sammy's project, we all clapped.
She just laughed and gave him a slap.

This girl has zero self-control.
In mud and slop she stomps and rolls.

She tore her skirt climbing a maple.
Two of her fingers are joined with a staple.

Harriet's locked the bathroom door.
Now Sammy's peed all over the floor.

No respect she has for teachers.
They all want to shout and beat her.

But that they certainly cannot do.
Her parents and the state would sue.

Little Fred dials 9-1-1
To report that this just ain't no fun.

The police believe it's all a prank.
"Is that that little joker, Frank?"

"No, it's Fred, and Harriet's loose.
I think you better bring a noose!"

Sirens screamed and children fled.
I think a first-grader even bled.

The cops arrived and stormed the school,
Searching for this girly-ghoul.

But all they found in Room 23
Was a wee, young thing that chirped, "Not me."

Stunned and stymied. There they stood.
They did their best and all they could.

Then out the window, somebody spied
A disheveled lass go rocketing by.

Across the playground she skipped and danced.

They'll never catch her.

They missed their chance.

Four-Dimensionalism in Michael Cunningham's *The Hours*

AUSTIN ROY | VERMONT

This paper seeks to elucidate (at least in part) how Cunningham's inquiry of temporal constructs (specifically in the "Mrs. Dalloway" and "Mrs. Brown" sections) forces readers to reconfigure their interpretations of the novel's quotidian leitmotifs and protagonists. More specifically, this discourse explores Cunningham's text through the lens of temporal mereology. In outline, this paper will provide a broad overview of temporal mereology (§1), argue that Cunningham transitions from an existential to an absolute four-dimensional perspective over the course of the novel (§2 and §3), and explore the significance of this metaphysical shift. The purpose of this analysis is not merely to dissect the philosophical foundation of *The Hours*, but also to shed light on how Cunningham warps time in order to imbue the quotidian with dynamism and create characters who are simultaneously relatable and deeply unknowable.

1. Mereology, Three- and Four-Dimensionalism, and Continuants and Occurents

Mereology

Mereology, the metaphysical study of parthood, examines the relationships of parts and wholes. Examples of parthood relations include a tail as a part of a cat, an hour as a part of a day, and a cake as a part of a birthday party. Some parts are spatial (extending three-dimensionally through space, such as a cat's tail) while others are temporal (extending four-dimensionally through time, such as an hour in a day) (Butterfield, 33-37).

Three- and Four-Dimensionalism

Three-dimensionalism (i.e. presentism) suggests that "all that exists is temporally present" (Kleinschmidt, 2). For example, a three-dimensionalist would say the carrot cake in the kitchen exists fully because it is currently sitting on the counter. Contrastingly, four-dimensionalism (i.e. perdurance) suggests that materials are composed of various temporal parts (Fine, 699; Kleinschmidt, 3). The four-dimensionalist would argue the carrot cake does

not *fully* exist in the kitchen right now—rather a temporal segment of the cake is sitting on the kitchen counter. The full existence of the cake is stretched temporally from the moment it began existing as a cake (perhaps in the oven when the contents of the pan shifted from "batter" to "cake") through the moment it ceases to exist as a cake (perhaps when fully eaten).

Continuants and Occurents

Three and four-dimensionalism can be applied to both continuants and occurents (Fine, 702-703; Simons, 61). A continuant is an object (such as a cake) whose definition does not depend on time; an occurent is an event (such as a day) that exists *only* by extending through time.

Existential and Absolute Four-Dimensionalism

The notion of continuants and occurents allows for a further subdivision of four-dimensionalism into *existential* four-dimensionalism (Kleinschmidt, 3) and *absolute* four-dimensionalism (Brogaard, 341; Sider 1-2). Existential four-dimensionalism is the belief that continuants extend three-dimensionally and occurents extend four-dimensionally (Kleinschmidt, 3). The existential four-dimensionalist would argue that the carrot cake on the counter (a continuant) is not composed of temporal parts, but that the party where the cake is eaten (an occurent) *is* composed of temporal parts. Contrastingly, an absolute four-dimensionalist would argue that both the cake and the party extend four-dimensionally (Brogaard, 341; Sider 1-2). In *The Hours*, Cunningham presents both of these subdivisions of four-dimensionality in order to alter readers' interpretations of the texts' leitmotifs and protagonists.

2. Existential Four-Dimensionalism in *The Hours*

Each of the storylines in *The Hours* centers on a primary occurent (Richard's party in the "Mrs. Dalloway" storyline and Laura reading her book in the "Mrs. Brown" storyline) and a primary continuant (the food in the "Mrs. Dalloway" section and the birthday cake in the "Mrs. Brown" storyline). In the first half of the novel, Cunningham treats the occurents four-dimensionally and the continuants three-dimensionally, establishing an existential four-dimensionalist perspective. In doing this, Cunningham insinuates that the continuants are simpler and more easily understood than the occurents.

Early in the first "Mrs. Dalloway" section, Cunningham introduces the first occurent and continuant leitmotif contiguously, underscoring their incongruity. In describing Clarissa's upcoming evening, he writes, "She will fill the rooms of her apartment with food and flowers, with people of wit and influence. She will shepherd Richard through it, see that he doesn't overtire, and then she will escort him uptown to receive his prize" (Cunningham 13). When describing the party (the occurent) Cunningham utilizes temporally oriented language, implying four-dimensionalism. First, he writes that Clarissa "will shepherd Richard through it" implying that the party must extend through time since it is an event that one can be "shepherded through." Second, Cunningham references Clarissa's worry that Richard "doesn't overtire"—wording which draws attention to the fact that time passing is an integral component of a party. Third, Cunningham's closing of the sentence—"and then she will escort him uptown" (specifically the word 'then')—reiterates the temporally extended nature of the party. Contrastingly, Cunningham's description of the continuants in the first sentence is devoid of temporally oriented language. Moreover, his verb choice, "will fill" directly references the spatial (i.e. three-dimensional) properties of the continuants. This existential four-dimensionalist approach indicates to the reader that the occurents are more nuanced than the continuants. While the continuants are treated as mere objects used to "fill the rooms of her apartment," the occurent acts as the grounding focus of the passage and (as is later revealed) the epicenter of Clarissa's day.

This existential four-dimensionalist approach is continued in the early "Mrs. Brown" sections. Cunningham introduces the key occurent (Laura reading her book) noting, "she lays the book face down on her chest. Already her bedroom (no, *their* bedroom) feels more densely inhabited, more actual, because of a character named Mrs. Dalloway on her way to buy flowers. Laura glances at the clock on the nightstand. It's well past seven" (Cunningham, 37). Here, Cunningham directly follows the introduction of the occurent with mentions of the clock and the time, clearly inviting the reader to consociate the reading of the book and the passage of time. He repeats this tactic pages later where he states, "One page; she decides; just one . . . She will permit herself another minute here, in bed, before entering the day. She will allow herself just a little more time" (Cunningham, 40). By using language such as "another minute," "entering the day," and "a little more time," Cunningham emphasizes the inherent temporality (and four-dimensionality) of the occurent. Contrastingly, when describing the key continuant (the cake), Cunningham utilizes language to halt time rather than to indicate its passing. When

describing Laura's intentions for the cake, he writes, "she is going to produce a birthday cake—only a cake—but in her mind at this moment the cake is glossy and resplendent as any photograph in any magazine; it is better, even, than the photographs of cakes in magazines" (Cunningham, 76). While the comparison of the cake to a photograph of a cake seems primarily to suggest the air of perfection Laura is striving for, it simultaneously implies that the cake is, like a photograph in a magazine, frozen in time rather than extended through it. While the four-dimensional approach to the occurent conveys gravity and import, the three-dimensional approach to the continuant connotes stagnancy. Cunningham treats the materials this way to illustrate that reading the book (the occurent) provides Laura's life with dimensionality whereas her cake (the continuant), a representation of her unfulfillment, keeps her suspended in time.

3. Absolute Four-Dimensionalism in *The Hours*

In the second half of the novel, Cunningham shifts from existential to absolute four-dimensionalism by modifying his approach to the continuants from three-dimensional to four-dimensional. This transition suggests that the leitmotifs serve a dual purpose. While their initial objective is to provide metaphor (e.g. Dan's imperfect birthday cake representing Laura's muted life), their secondary intention is to puncture the notion that anything (even simple objects) can ever be fully known. The reader is lured into believing that they understand the leitmotifs, but by shifting the metaphysical foundation of the text in the second half of the novel, Cunningham indicates that it is impossible to fully understand anything (continuant or occurent).

In the final "Mrs. Dalloway" section, Cunningham revisits the food (a continuant leitmotif) via a distinctly four-dimensionalist lens. Cunningham writes, "It seems, briefly, to Clarissa, that the food—that most perishable of entities—will remain here after she and the others have disappeared; after all of them, even Julia, have died. Clarissa imagines the food still here, still fresh somehow, untouched, as she and the others leave these rooms, one by one, forever" (Cunningham 224). In labeling the food "that most perishable of entities" Cunningham draws attention to the lifespan (and, consequently, the four-dimensionality) of this continuant. Additionally, he incorporates the provisional language "it seems" and the more hypothetical "Clarissa imagines" when referencing the notion that the food will not age and decay. Moreover, Cunningham treats the food as a memento mori, contextualizing it with phrases such as "the others have disappeared" and "after all of them, even

Julia, have died." Through these unsubtle references to the food as ephemera, Cunningham establishes a decisively four-dimensionalist tone when describing the continuant. This implication that continuants are composed of temporal fragments forces readers to reevaluate their perceptions of *all* continuants in the text (including the protagonists). Although Cunningham's presentation of Clarissa Vaughn is thorough and meticulous, readers must contend with the reality that they cannot fully know or understand her since they are privy only to a single day in her life.

This shift to absolute four-dimensionalism serves a similar purpose in the penultimate "Mrs. Brown" section when Cunningham makes the final reference to Dan's birthday cake. After Laura asks her son, Richie, if he has made a wish, Cunningham inserts that "his wishes, like his father's, have mainly to do with continuance. Like his father, what he wants most ardently is more of what he's already got . . . Like his father, he senses that more of this is precisely what they may very well not get." This is immediately followed by Dan's question to his son, "How would you like to help me cut the cake?" (Cunningham, 206). In referencing "continuance" and "wishes," Cunningham invokes the present and the future respectively. In doing so, he invites the reader to consider temporal segments (the present and the future). In following this with Dan's question, "would you like to help me cut the cake," Cunningham suggests that the cake (although not an occurent) possesses temporal parts implying absolute four-dimensionalism. Furthermore, this metaphysical shift applies not only to the cake itself, but also (since it is a leitmotif) to what the cake represents: Laura's life. It is this reconfiguration of time that forces readers to grapple with the notion that characters, like occurents, are temporally fractured and, consequently, never *fully* present during a single moment in the novel.

In shifting from an existential to an absolute four-dimensional perspective, Cunningham forces readers to wrestle not merely with the notion of temporal parthood, but also with the question of what it means to exist. While readers may deeply connect to the characters, Cunningham's metaphysical shift forces them to reconcile with the fact that they are privy only to a single temporal segment of each character. The "complete" Laura and the "complete" Clarissa remain unknown by the end of the novel. This is, in many ways, unsettling. However, it is precisely this disquieting revelation that requires readers to reflect, to reevaluate their conceptions of time, knowledge, and human endeavor. It is with this maneuver that Cunningham transforms *The Hours* from a novel about characters—their days, fears, and aspirations—to one about time and how the human condition operates within it.

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Spiraling

VICTORIA PEREZ | OXFORD

Anxiety.
Pressure to succeed
overthinking to vast extremes
reread, reread, reread.
Starting, impossible
at least it seems.
Just take a break;
you'll feel happy.
Expectations I fail to meet
resorting to apathy
and repeat.

Live Free or Die

CHRISTIANA CADE | VERMONT

"The bullies used to drag me down," she said.

"But now? Now I thank 'em."

And before you could catch her name, she was off,
Her license plate having the last word:
PUGLY.

ashes

KATIE BRIMM | VERMONT

We separated my grandfather
this morning at 11:10am

i gazed down into the cardboard
box where he was
powdered and gritty

i n c i n e r a t e d

my aunt scooped him
out placed a handful
(fingers, belly, knee?)
into a little silver box one of twenty-four

he spilled
onto the counter leaving
white drifts not unlike
flour forgotten while baking
bread

my aunt flattened the fleshy
part of her hand against dust piles
swept her father
into our palms

now he is in my
(and my aunt's and my mom's and my grandmother's)
palm lines creases that carry story
how many children you will have
how long you will live.

This morning it is raining i am dizzy
and odd we women stand
in this kitchen as if to prepare

a meal as if i don't recognize
a powdery screw (pacemaker? hip?)
and so much wire.

This morning there are photos of him
everywhere on the floor on tables
for a celebration
of life but
i don't recognize him

he is tan brown haired eyes light body strong languid on a dock
a dog i never met sprawls across his lap

there is sunshine, and he is
laughing.

circa 2002

JAMIE WILBER | VERMONT

this will be brilliant
12th grade creative writing class
a teenager attempts to write something that matters
it's too much prose not enough poem
the teacher always says
that's too descriptive
not descriptive enough
need to create meaningful metaphors
like about your heart of stone
black as the pavement
surrounded by an iron gate
instead you write about being a sagittarius
and shooting flaming arrows and
jupiter and
hoof prints in the soil
an ode to a t-shirt
writing satire before you knew what satire was
a noisy poem about working in a restaurant and
a childhood friend you lost contact with and
something about an old, broken down boat and
fishing trips with dad and
memories and
fallen leaves and
a teddy bear that knows what it's like
when your parents fight
at night
trying to write as well as your best friend
and failing and
high school was maybe too easy until now and
i don't know how to put all my angst into a poem and
why am i trying to and
i'm sorry, Ms. Arra
i'm not a poet

Early Purchase

COZA PERRY | OXFORD

The rug would have covered almost the entire room. They chose it because the elephants and giraffes reminded them of their honeymoon, and they loved yellow. About five days after the rug arrived, they received a call—the blood work came back; could they come in tomorrow?

They arrived early, which wasn't like them. They sat very close together.

"Everything might be fine," he said.

"Yes. It might." She squeezed his hand.

When it was time, they followed the nurse to an exam room. The walls were more pink than they were beige. The table was made of gray plastic, and the chairs were covered in cracked brown leather. She lay down on the table. He sat in a chair close by. The nurse turned off the lights.

"Is it your first time with one of these?" She gestured toward a computer attached to a transducer wand.

"No," they said.

"Well then you know the drill. I'll be taking the pictures today. It'll take about 30 minutes; we might need a lot of pictures. You can watch the screen of course, but I won't answer questions about what it means."

She moved the wand around at various angles and clicked a small button on the top. Images flashed on the computer with each click. As she worked, she chatted with the couple. The hospital had recruited her from Detroit ten years ago. She had a daughter and two grandchildren back in Detroit, but she loved the mountains in Colorado. She enjoyed being the head nurse and had worked hard for her license to use this specialty equipment, which was state-of-the-art when she graduated nursing school. When she finished, she wished them both well and left. The lights were still off.

The doctor arrived ten minutes later. He spoke softly. "Would you mind sharing what you understand about why you're here? I'd like to know what you know."

"My AFP levels were elevated."

"Did you do a little side-research online about what elevated AFP levels might mean? Most patients do."

The couple glanced at each other. They both laughed a little. "How did you know I'm a hypochondriac? WebMD told me it could mean a lot of things—there was a mistake with the test and my levels are fine. She might have a cleft-palate. I might have liver cancer."

The doctor smiled kindly. "Those are all possibilities, except liver cancer doesn't make much sense in this scenario."

The couple nodded, not quite relieved.

"Have you ever heard of limb body wall complex?"

Over the next ten minutes they learned that it is very rare to develop limb body wall complex, and that lungs and livers and kidneys sometimes grow outside the body. They looked at blurry black and white images and pretended to see lungs and a liver and kidneys. They didn't have to pretend to see that the spine was quite crooked.

"Is she in pain?" They wanted to know.

"Not right now, no."

"What would her quality of life be?"

They learned that it's impossible for someone to survive if their lungs and liver and kidneys grew outside their body.

The first procedure was 48 hours later. It was painful. They held hands the whole time. The second was faster and easier than they expected. "We bought a beautiful yellow rug with elephants on it," she told the doctors as anesthesia kicked in.

When she woke up, the nurse was doting and kind. "Take some Tylenol, and let's get you a little Oxycodone, too. It'll make you sleep like a baby tonight." After half an hour of monitoring, they were allowed to go home.

They both slept until noon the next day. They tucked the rug into the back of a closet and piled suitcases in front of it. They took a few days off from work. They bought soil and bricks and seeds and built a garden. After a while, the snapdragons grew between the leaves of the marigolds. A purple delphinium sat proudly in the center of the garden, and it grew a little crooked.

The Man I Didn't Want to Know

MICHAEL O'CONNOR | VERMONT

I once knew a man
I didn't want to know.
Led me down a different path
I didn't want to go.

Time went by without a sign
Of heeding his behest
'Til many years had run away,
And finally I said yes.

The slings and arrows never stopped,
But new armor made of light,
Taught me how to stand my ground
And maintain a noble fight.

Scars of battles won and lost
Quilted me around
And somehow kept me going
And allowed me to abound.

But despite my sterling resume
The darkness slithered inside.
Could I keep on holding fast
Or would I start to slide?

A bloody war raged over
My every thought and day
What to do, how to resist
I was nothing else but clay.

The struggle always found me.
The man I somehow lost.
So in my desert did I crawl,
Lamenting the dreadful cost.

Notwithstanding, I noticed, though:
Three birds the other day.
Upon my sill they did alight
With seeming want to say.

A tiny epistle one did carry,
While the contents the others spoke.
I was not poor, I was not lost
And certainly was not broke.

With peace, they beamed at me,
Eternal beckoning to take flight.
My face was dry and then a flood
Of long-lost love and light.

Time elapsed, sour air expunged,
Stillness covered the land.
But I arose, walked down the path,
And again I saw the man.

Dedication

GENITHIA HOGGES | OXFORD

From Sherehe shout outs to dance party diehards,
Pond Reading props to Blue Parlor blow outs,
Y'all make this place feel like family.

I don't mean like play cousins.
I mean like . . .
Brothers and sisters and elders.

So far beyond faculty and friends,
We care for and come alongside each other.
We surround and support and sustain one another
With love.

This, right here, is our labor of love.
Labor that gives life
And receives life in return.

Thank you for the gift of co-laboring with you,
For building together, a space where we can be ourselves,
Sharing the tears, joys, and in-betweens of everyday life.

Thank you for making this place feel like family.

FACT CHECK

GENITHIA HOGGES | OXFORD

FACT.

I demand to not have to *relinquish my ancestors*
and their impact on my life in this space.[1]

Like many other descendants of slaves on this land,
I will not forget . . .
And I will not let you forget either.[2]

the process of colonization invented the colonized
and attempted a full reduction of them to less than human
primitives, satanically possessed,
infantile,
aggressively sexual,
and in need of transformation.

To see the coloniality is to see the powerful reduction of human beings
to animals,
to inferiors by nature,
. . . to dehumanized beings.[3]

CHECK.

Did they see themselves too clearly
in the light of the Other they professed to save?
Perhaps this was the true White Man's Burden—
a light shining in the East that drove the West to massacre
the innocents.
In fear, they reduced themselves to

animals,
inferiors by nature,
dehumanized beings,
less than human primitives,
satanically possessed,
infantile,
aggressively sexual,
in need of transformation
and salvation.

FACT.

I am concerned with the demand in settler colonial USA that we engage in practices aimed at producing historical unknowing about our potential "originating" stories . . . [4]

CHECK.

Colonization is beginning to look a lot like Euro-selective amnesia,
imposing the erasure of everyone's past experiences, histories,
languages, cultures.
Forcing each one into a predetermined hole in the wall built to divide
and conquer . . . what exactly?
European insecurity?
A collective inferiority complex?
International impostor syndrome?
Maybe ol' Whitey was feelin' some type o' way
when he saw all these brown, beautiful, bountiful civilizations.
Their light revealed his darkness, and he was afraid,
so he hid himself, his history, his heritage
from public record and private memory,
then invented an imaginary role for each to play
in his melodrama of modernity and progress.

FACT
CHECK.

My identity forces your memory to be longer than your lifespan
and, in doing so,
helps to keep the settler colonial machinations of this society in focus.[5]

Where did writing come from?
Not Europe
Where did civilization come from?
Not Europe
Where did the majority of humans come from?
Not Europe
So, they co-opted
Greece and Rome as their history
Phoenician letters as their alphabet
Evolution as their evidence
Violence as their weapon
Not realizing that in doing so,
they became the savages they
accused us of being.
Claiming Enlightenment,
but still groping in darkness.

No wonder you dismiss us.
Your pride and presumption don't qualify you to comprehend
the creativity that enables an unplaced people to make a home
that travels within them—
invisible to settler eyes
and invincible, but not invulnerable,
to settler ways.
Robbed of language and lineage,
you severed us at the root and hoped we would forget who we were.
You never counted on us looking to the Rock from which we were hewn and
letting Him make us anew. [6]
Some of us sang, "I've got a home in that Rock, don't you see?"

while others sang, “I’ve got a home up in that kingdom, ain’t that good news?” [7]
But the Rock and the kingdom were always one and the same.
Our home was never of this world.

And though my originating stories *on this land* begin with enslavement,
my creation stories *do not.*
For you see, *my memory is longer than my lifespan.*
And **I have been taught to never lose sight of what it means**
to have had to be set free . . . [8]

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[1] Adapted from Dotson, Kristie. “On the way to decolonizing in a settler colony: Re-introducing Black feminist identity politics.” AlterNative, vol. 14(3), 2018, p. 192
[2] Dotson 196.
[3] Lugones, María. “Toward a Decolonial Feminism.” Hypatia, vol. 25, no. 4 (Fall 2010), pp. 747 and 751.
[4] Dotson 190.
[5] Dotson 196.
[6] Isaiah 51:1 KJV
[7] Two Negro Spirituals with the same melody but different lyrics
[8] Dotson 196 and 192.

Dandelion Prayers

CAROLINE STEWART | VERMONT

my faith is fueled
by dandelion prayers
whispers of wishes, words, and wails
scatter whimsical whiskers
whisked by bated breath

never do i see the seed seated in soil
never do i witness the roots secure
only do i see the dandelion once again
when blooms beg my prayers to attend

Emily

SAVANNAH SKINNER | VERMONT

After the Power Company Bought the Field That Was Never Ours

SAVANNAH SKINNER | VERMONT

My sister asks me to imagine the world without hills,
& I cannot bear it. The sunset lasts long into the night,
the creek still & stagnant, nowhere to go but home.

Summer ferns at the top of the hill
grow sideways against the magnetic field.
Powerlines crackle through the night.

Fireflies forget the shape of their bodies,
while cables with a weight we can't imagine
rush downhill toward water, screaming
through the valley. Moving always away from us.

This is a love poem for my sister, the one singing
under the apple tree outside my window,
the one by the pond with a fishhook
embedded in the soft part of her back,
the one out in the field trying to catch
electricity with her bare hands.

Before, if asked how much blood it takes to make a family,
I would tell you we belong to water,
the creek in the woods behind our house. I would tell you
that we have a gravity all our own,
that the field of powerlines creates an orbit
in which we belong to each other.

After, I would tell you that everything leaves if you'll let it.

I want to ask my sister, *how much of our lives will we waste
trying to understand the way they began?*

But the powerlines swan-dive south,
leaving heat & sparks behind,
never knowing what they've lost.
My questions never reach their destination.
Time both heals & separates,
creates its own distance between us

until we've forgotten why
we can't hold each other tight, forgotten
how we untethered from the hills
in the absence of a gravity all our own.

Garden

LISA GRZYB | CALIFORNIA

Today in the garden you stood holding the tomato plant for so long the soil dried out and spilled through your fingers, the roots crisping into fragments because your heart was too burdened by the importance of the life of this seedling to let it rest. There wasn't any space left in the garden, but you could not leave it exposed to die. This scene of you in the garden, hair long and shirt cropped, will be replaced by other scenes—perhaps moments of clarity, or moments when the decisions needing to be made carry greater weight than the life of a tomato seedling.

The summer I was 14, Missy and I rode our bikes down the dusty Luce Line connecting our houses. When we hit the train trestle the scent of oil seeping out of the railroad ties burned through the humidity, the heat of the iron tracks waving up through the bottoms of our feet. We stashed our bikes in the woods that lined the trail and took out the pack of Parliaments that we stole out of the wicker toy chest where my mom unloaded her cases of cigarettes. Sun-In and lemon juice and tanning oil seared our foreheads—all the acrid scents and all the ways we burned ourselves that summer are now etched as wrinkles. As are the ways in which we raised each other when our own parents became too overwhelmed by their own problems and so underwhelmed by what it meant to raise children in the 80s and 90s. They led us to rage and beauty. They spotted us on the impossible balance of autonomy and protection in a world of false dangers. Oprah would guide them, but then so much was forgotten during commercials, and they'd veer off on a chemical exit ramp.

But Missy's parents still took us to church on Sunday mornings, gentle Pastor John crooning out the hymns. I remember walking with Missy the seven or so miles home one stifling Sunday and finding that pornographic graphic novel on the side of the road. Until then I hadn't known that people might want a story as much as they wanted sex, that plot and conflict were erotic. Our throats were parched, and our heads pounded as no one thought that we might need water—we had taken communion after all—but the discovery of that booklet fueled us all the way home, thoughts of some pervert hiding in the bushes, lying in wait, just like our mothers had warned us. We were all so naive.

But you, my child, don't have a toy box filled with cheap cigarettes at your disposal. You have tomato plants, the fate of their lives in your hands. And you understand that there is no greater truth or story than the life of a tomato plant. And you have the space in your unburnt soul to care for their wellbeing.

To Be Open

ARIANNA VAILAS | VERMONT

The guitar case on the street corner is open to strangers, its instrument
probably inside the joint, warming itself at the conversation of cafe-goers.

But the case is outside, bared to the spring air and the sky and the one tree on
the curb's edge that droops its arms over the pavement, and is silent

save for the footsteps of passersby and the opening-and-almost-closing door
and the little friendly bell on the door jingling and "thank you" and the shuffle
of clothing of khaki swiping past suede and "oh sorry about that"

—and the guitar case silent and hopeful—

and someone stoops over its open mouth to drop in four quarters jingling
together as they fall and land hard in the soft felt—

and it is good:
to be open enough
to an offering
to be held.

it was heaven while i had you

MISAO MCGREGOR | CALIFORNIA

Do you know that elephants bury their dead?
Scientists have observed a number of different ways
elephants seem to react to the remains of their loved ones.
Some touch, smell, taste the remains.
Others even carry the body to a less populated area
and cover them with mud or leaves or branches,
just so they have an undisturbed place to rest.

I've always loved how humans and elephants share these kinds of meaning
through ritual.
How loss affects all of us, regardless of species. Although sometimes,
I rather prefer elephant rituals to human ones.
Once you know how elephants interact with their dead,
a casket just seems so
impersonal—
clinical, even.

Then again,
all of these rituals assume that there's a body to mourn.
That there's a physical entity to be treated with care and respect.
But when something dies inside of you . . .
it can be hard to treat yourself with the same reverence.

Beat.

You know,
it's believed that when a mother elephant loses her baby,
the other elephants stand in a circle around her, allowing her
all the time she needs to grieve and mourn.
Without false platitudes like
"sometimes, this happens" or
"it's more common than you think,"
she can just cry and cry

and rage against all that is holy
without being made to feel like her grief is small
or inconsequent.

Still,
some will say that it's just a natural part of her cycle.
And maybe it is.

But have you ever considered whether it was cramps,
or contractions?

Is it just another period,
or is it a birth?

Maybe it's silly to get caught up in semantics.

But when a birthing place becomes a burial site,
you tend to prefer words that carry
the weight of what you're truly feeling.

Beat.

I've been thinking about heaven a lot lately.
About whether it's a place, or a feeling, or both.
And how it's always described as this final destination,
the ultimate resting place where at last you end up.

Being pregnant was
the closest I came
to feeling like
heaven had a place for me at all.
Because it wasn't a place I was looking forward to experiencing.
I was already in it.

So,
if I never get to see that light again,
and if we never have the chance to properly meet,
please know that...

it was heaven while I had you.

And I'd do it all over again,
just the same.

Green Gym Shorts, Black Mask, and White Teeth

RICARDO ALBERTO LINARES MARTAGÓN | OXFORD

I walked in. I looked for help but everyone seemed really busy so I just went in and sat at a table for two in the back, by a wall, facing the entrance.

A young waitress appeared into my field of vision from around the corner. She was wearing very tight and small gym shorts of a green hue that I normally only see in toys or candy. She went to a table outside and on her way back in she spotted me. *Yes, hi, I'm here!* I said with my eyes. She approached me.

"Hi, sir! Are you dinin' in with us today?" she said, standing two feet away from me, raising her voice, her stance open as if ready to sprint.

"Hi, yes!" I said.

"Ok. I'll get you set up!" She said and walked swiftly away.

I thought she had sounded a little harsh, hadn't she? but then realized it was maybe because of the mask. She was wearing a taut black mask—as was all the personnel—which also explained why her eyelashes and eyebrows were so neatly done. *Cute.*

Our odd little exchange remained in my head for a few more seconds until I reached into my backpack and took out the book I was currently reading: *White Teeth* by Zadie Smith—*Chapter Six: The Temptation of Samad Iqbal.* I knew it was going to be good, so I was anxious to start reading.

She reappeared with a glass of water and a set of utensils wrapped in a dinner napkin. In her left hand she also held a mobile POS system to take orders.

"Thank you," I said as she set down the water and the utensils. I gave the water a quick sip. *Ahhh!* It was ninety-five degrees outside. "I'm sorry I seated myself but you guys—".

"—That's ok." She cut me off. "During the week we don't have a hostess so you're fine. Are you ready to order?" She added politely, but once again a tingle in her voice kind of rubbed me the wrong way.

"Not quite," I said. "But I'd like to start out with a cappuccino with oat milk, please..."

"Right away, sir!" she said.

"Thank you!" I raised my voice as she was already walking away towards the kitchen.

When she came back I thought I might ask her if everything was ok, if she was angry at something or at someone. Maybe somehow I had upset her . . . but then I thought that if I asked her that, things could easily take a turn for the worse, because I would be implying that she seemed upset, wouldn't I be? And that alone could actually anger her, right? So I decided it was best to not say anything. *Calladito te ves más bonito.*

She materialized again. A lovely etched flower lay atop my coffee.

"Thank you. I am ready now," I said as she placed the coffee in front of me. "I'll have your grilled chicken sandwich, please." She typed my order into her little machine and then excused herself, quietly, her tone still bothering me.

While she was gone I continued thinking what if her demeanor really had something to do with my not waiting to be seated? Or perhaps with my keeping my sunglasses on? Or maybe it had something to do with me, with my overall poise which can sometimes be mistaken for smugness but that in reality isn't. It's just the way I carry myself—with a lot of confidence. You can't be mad at a man for being confident, can you?

I let it go and went back to my book. *Samad Iqbal*, a married, devoted Muslim man, was falling for his sons' music teacher. *Madness!* And wasn't I, for one, falling for the waitress? *Squared Madness!*

I sipped my delectable coffee and continued reading. Around five minutes went by before she came back with my meal: a chicken sandwich on ciabatta bread with a side of arugula sprinkled with cotija cheese. She set it down and then asked if I needed anything else. I suddenly felt compelled to say something funny to make her laugh, like: "I'm sorry but I ordered the *adult* size."

But of course I didn't. Instead I just asked her for some salsa.

Somehow I thought that the more interactions we had the less surly she would be. When she returned with the salsa I said thank you and she said no problem, though it sounded like she did have a problem. *Fine!*

I devoured the sandwich.

Three hundred seconds later or less all there was left on my plate was an empty space once occupied by matter in the form of bread and meat. She eyed my plate from a distance and immediately walked up to me to ask me if I would like something else. I said I would love a toast. She asked what kind and I said whatever she thought was the best.

I returned to my reading. From the looks of it, *Samad Iqbal* was about to commit adultery . . .

She came back and I kindly thanked her again. Next to the toast was a small side of butter so I asked her for some jam, too. She said she didn't have

jam per se but blueberry compote only. I said I didn't know what that was but that I would take it. She "happily" agreed to get me some right away yet she still seemed impervious to my kindness.

While she went away I decided to take a quick inventory of our overall interaction so far:

(a) For the most part, her words were polite and her attitude very accommodating; however, her demeanor remained somewhat stern throughout. Maybe she can't help it, I told myself, maybe that's what she's like all the time. *Maybe.*
(b) What was undeniable, though, was that she didn't like me from the moment she saw me, and that bothered me. If confronted, she could easily deny it and say I was crazy, and then I would have no case whatsoever, except still for the contempt (albeit only visible to me) in her eyes, her body language, and in her voice.

All in all, the reality was I could not say or do anything because every path I saw led to me being embarrassed and apologizing profusely. I decided therefore, that I would leave it at that: she disliked me God knows why and I was ok with it. Although I really wasn't, who am I kidding...

I wanted her to like me, to flirt with me, to ask me about what I was reading. *Is it good? What's it about? Do you recommend it? Where do you buy your books?... You seem like a really nice, interesting guy... Would you like to hang out sometime? Yes, of course I would.* But that's not at all how it went. No.

"Here you are, sir!" She placed a two-ounce container on the table with what looked like blueberry sauce. *So this is compote! Hmm, ok.* I thanked her ever so gently this time. "Uh-huh," she said.

I carefully spread some compote over my toast and then proceeded to eat it in small bites while also sipping my now lukewarm cappuccino, hoping to make both last for as long as possible. To her credit, the toast was the softest, fluffiest, yummiest piece of bread I had ever had. And I've had my fair share of bread (I'm Mexican, so), but this one was definitely now among my top three. *Pambazos* still reigned supreme, of course.

By then *Samad Iqbal* and *Miss Burt-Jones* had kissed! *No way!*

After I was finished with my toast and my coffee she came up to say she was leaving and would I like anything else or could she close me out? I said I'd like to settle up before she left. As a last resort I thought that if I gave her a bigger tip than what she was probably expecting from a Latino she might end up softening up to me.

She rang me up. I handed her a crisp one hundred dollar bill which she had to take in the back as she didn't have enough change handy. She returned with my change which I gathered quickly, wanting to tip her right then and there. But before I could even have the money ready she retreated, thanking me and wishing me a good day. I only said likewise and thank you, assuming she would definitely come back for her money.

The bill had been for $25.35. I placed the change on the table plus a five dollar bill and three singles, for a total of $8.65, which technically amounted to more than 30% of the bill. Not bad, I thought. And then I put the money at the edge of the table so she knew it was ready for her to take.

While I waited I opened back my book: *Samad* was definitely hot for the teacher—I had to keep reading! *At least someone was getting some . . .*

She came into my field of vision again, wiped down mechanically a couple tables down from where I was sitting and then went around the corner again for some minutes. She finally came out with a small purse around her shoulder, aiming straight for the door, waving goodbye to her coworkers, and certainly not looking at me.

I put down my book and watched her leave.

Evidently, she never came back for her tip. I assumed she thought it was probably not worth it, that I would most likely leave a meager couple of dollars because that's how we, Latinos (at least a lot of us, in my experience), are. Either that or her green gym shorts had started to chafe.

Hurt for no apparent reason, I went back to my book. *Samad Iqbal* had just gotten caught cheating. *Ha-ha . . . Idiot!* I finished the chapter and as I was getting ready to leave, I noticed my hand and then my ring finger and at the end of this—my wedding band . . . *Squared idiot!*

Going Somewhere

DYLLAN ANTHONY MORAN | VERMONT

Okay, I can only say this to you when we're alone.
When I'm swimming, I remember what it feels
like to stretch myself towards something—
that moving your body faster gets you there
slower—that you always end up at
the place you came from—that you
become stronger through repetition.

When I'm back from the pool, I lie on the
comforter and sleep. Another type of moving
towards something—I think about sitting
on your couch and cupping the heel of your
foot in my palm. But I do not dream.
Blank spaces punched through all the days.
Fantasy is like that. Hours inserted into
slots they cannot be.

So this is a poem about carrying yourself
into the future by staying still. This is
a way of saying that it's the reaching
that gets you there and not the going.

So yeah, I saw a tree today in a cloud
of thousands of bees. It rained so long
ago, but the Earth still can't hold my
weight. You'll never see this place. And still—
you're the only thing that is here.

A Jawbone in Georgia

RACHEL NOLI | OXFORD

Mama and Daddy were both dead now. Daddy had gotten sick a few years ago, but Mama's death had been sudden and unexpected. The Youngest Daughter didn't think she'd be seeing her siblings under these circumstances for several more years yet.

But Mama and Daddy *were* dead, and so the Youngest Daughter zipped up her khaki coat and began hiking up the mountain. Her watch told her she had about forty more minutes to get as high up as she could before somewhere below her, hidden away in the dusty old farmhouse, the grandfather clock would strike six.

The trails hadn't been used much since their childhoods, but enough deer still frequented the path to make it clear where one switchback ended and the next began. The only sound that filled her ears was the trickling of the creek over smooth, mossy rocks and the dead, brown leaves crunching beneath her hiking boots. They were stiff and chafed at her ankles, but she didn't stop.

Everything had been so straightforward as somehow she knew it would. She and her husband had driven the family station wagon down the long, gravel driveway. They'd parked on the lifeless grass. They'd walked up the aggregate walkway and let themselves in through the creaking screen door.

They'd entered the old white house. It had always felt frozen in time somehow—a perfect suspension of their childhoods unmarked by the passing of years. Even once their children had grown and moved on, Mama and Daddy hadn't changed a thing. But now that they were both gone, it had felt less frozen and more decayed. There was dust where there had never been dust, and a stale smell filled the house.

The kitchen, always the command center, had been full. The Eldest Daughter and her husband, and the Sons and their wives. Only the attorney had sat apart—easily distinguishable by his dark skin and suit. The grandfather clock down the hall had chimed five times.

The Youngest Daughter had taken stock of the room. The yellowed kitchen timer sat on the windowsill where Mama had left it. Daddy's scotch glass still sat by his chair, Mama unable to move it. The blue and green wallpaper still peeling at the corners. Daddy had told Mama she could replace it, but she never could seem to make herself do it. She'd raised her children with that wallpaper. It wasn't an easy change to make.

The Youngest Daughter's presence meant they could begin.

"Good evening all," the attorney had said, nodding around the room as greeting. "We know why we're here: to settle your late parents' estate. Unless anyone feels the need, I won't go into the specific details. Y'all signed their last wishes when your father died, the last time we were here together. Does anyone have any questions before I proceed?"

He paused. No one said a word. No one looked at each other. He nodded. "Well it's all quite simple then. As you know, your parents left specific instructions. Spouses, you will return in the morning. Whatever decision has been made by sunrise will be binding. I need verbal confirmation of understanding."

An echo of agreement had resounded throughout the room. The man nodded again. The spouses made their quiet farewells, and the group dwindled to five. There was no need for discussion. Everything had already been settled. There was no turning back now.

His gaze lingered on each of their faces for a brief moment before gathering his papers from the kitchen table and snapping shut his black leather briefcase.

The kitchen table. Where they had grown up eating meals together. Mama never let anyone miss supper for anything, and dinner was court where Daddy passed down his word as law. Absolute and unyielding. Mama had wanted them all together, but she let him dispense whatever justice he saw fit—never interfering. For many years, the children were to be seen and not heard. But eventually Daddy just couldn't help but let the Eldest Brother regale them with tales of his team's latest win, his election to student council, the girl that was just so obsessed with him, or his acceptance to the Emory School of Law.

The Eldest Brother had stood apart from them, even now. The Youngest Daughter and her siblings had hovered near the lawyer, but the Eldest had leaned against the kitchen counter with his arms folded across his chest.

The lawyer spoke one final time.

"I'll be back in twelve hours. Remember the rules. I'll see you in the morning."

He left without another word. The four sat for a moment until the Eldest Brother finally broke the silence.

"Like the man said, we all know the rules. We've got one hour from the time he leaves. It's too late to bicker about it now. Anyone need any clarification on that?" he asked shortly. The others shook their heads.

"That's what I thought. I don't know about y'all, but I don't plan on sittin' here chatting for the next hour. What y'all do is up to you," he said, straightening. He turned and walked back into the hall. A door had opened and closed.

The remaining three lingered for the briefest of moments, unmoored without a familial figurehead telling them where to go. It had always been Daddy, then the Son. Mama had clung to him after Daddy's death, always needing a man to take the helm of the ship.

Sentimentality lost the fight, and without any more ado, the other three siblings had dispersed.

Only the Eldest Brother had remained inside; the Younger Brother headed towards the lake and the Eldest Sister to the fields. The Youngest went to the mountain.

She'd given this a great deal of thought. After Daddy died and Mama got sick, she'd had to start planning for this. They'd all signed the family agreement a year ago, and so they'd had time to think.

The Youngest Daughter didn't know what the others were scheming—the logic behind the lake or the fields or the house. All she knew was that she needed to climb. Distance was her ally.

Mama and Daddy both had their families torn apart by disputes and squabbles over wills and inheritances. Daddy had come up with a plan, and after he died sooner than expected, everyone had agreed to it. According to the will, all the guns were supposed to be locked up in the family safe, and only the lawyer had the combination. An even playing field, Daddy had said.

And so the Youngest Daughter climbed the mountain. It was November, but in north Georgia it was usually still fairly warm this time of year. But of course tonight it was cool, and gray clouds hung oppressively low, hiding the sun as it touched the horizon. It would be a cold night, but at least the smell of rain did not pervade the air as she climbed.

She kept a steady pace and checked her watch frequently. When seven minutes remained, a sound echoed up the mountainside and stopped her momentarily in her tracks. It sounded like a gunshot. The Youngest Daughter began to run.

The mountain was not particularly tall as mountains go, but it was steep. Even as children when they'd wandered all over looking for black bears and arrowheads, they'd head back home exhausted with legs made of jelly. But now, she made herself run.

The Youngest Daughter hadn't tried to hide in what direction she had

gone, but she hoped her head start and the slope would help her maintain an upper hand. The decay of leaves would warn her of any approaching predators—human or otherwise.

Darkness almost completely covered the mountainside now, and just as the moon began to peek through the clouds, the Youngest Daughter did not have time to see that something obstructed her path. She tripped and fell sprawling into a tangle of thick roots jutting from the dirt. She touched her forehead to find a cut and small trickle of blood intermingled with the reddish clay she was so familiar with. She cursed and rolled to see what her feet were still tangled in.

Bones. Bile rose in her throat. She leaned closer.

The carcass was old, old enough for it to mostly be indistinguishable, but enough of the skull remained to reassure the Youngest Daughter that it was not human. The night was getting to her.

She stood, brushing herself off as best she could, and leaned closer. Bits of the skeleton were missing, no doubt dragged off by scavengers. Shreds of reddish flesh still clung to some of the broken ribs. The scent of rot was barely noticeable in the chill night air.

A startling laugh escaped her chest. She had made it higher up the mountain than she realized.

The thing had been a boar. She glanced around and spotted a nearby tree with a distinct protrusion. She moved closer and found that the jawbone of the creature was lodged about waist high in the tree trunk. It was bleached white; its colorlessness stark against the evergreen.

The Youngest Daughter yanked the jawbone. It took a few attempts to free it from the tree. It fit well in her hand, the curve of the jaw almost feeling like a handle. She took a moment to turn her wrist this way and that, feeling the balance and the weight of it. Many of the teeth were missing, creating odd ridges and sharp lines. But it was sturdy.

She tucked it into the back of her jeans and kept going.

The moon continued to pass in and out of the cloud cover, making it impossible to read her watch. She felt the time passing only by the beat of her own heart. It was in that indistinguishable time of night, after midnight but well before any human hour, that another shot rang out through the night. This time it was not the faint echoes that jolted the Youngest Daughter to alertness. This time it was very, very close.

She had seconds to consider options. She thought of climbing one of the looming pines—she'd be near impossible to spot, but it'd also be near

impossible to get away if discovered. Running would give away her location and in the end, served no purpose. Movement several yards in front of her stopped her breath in her lungs. This was the moment—perhaps the only chance she had to move into check.

She squinted and silently thanked the moon for choosing that moment to once again show its shining face.

The Youngest Daughter inched closer to the Eldest Brother. Somehow she had always known it would be him. He'd always been the most determined. The most certain. When he hadn't been able to use what Mama had called his silver tongue to charm his way out of a situation. So it was no surprise that he'd thrown the rules to the wind and was now stalking through the night with Daddy's hunting rifle slung over his shoulder.

The Youngest Daughter stepped when he stepped. He was alert but with the self assurance of a man with a gun. He was not afraid of her.

He was not afraid, but he still sure felt the pain when the Youngest Daughter raised the jawbone over her head and brought it down with all her might against his skull. A wet crack filled the night, followed by the sound of the Eldest Brother falling to his knees. The Youngest Daughter wrenched the gun from his grasp.

The Eldest Brother moaned and clutched his head. His face became almost completely obscured by blood. He peered up through wet eyelashes to see his Youngest Sister looming over him.

"You've got a bit of my scalp there on that thing in your hand," he said. Thick, viscous red ran down his face and coated his teeth. The Youngest Daughter glanced at the jawbone in her hand. It seemed he was right. He swayed. He tried to stand but couldn't manage it.

"It'd be easier if you'd just use the shotgun," the Eldest Brother said. The Youngest Daughter looked at him there, hunched over in the dirt. He'd always been the predator. But now he seemed barely more alive than the piles of bones that had gifted her with her weapon.

She considered the gun in her hands. The will said no guns. Mama and Daddy said no guns.

She'd played by their rules all her life. There was no reason to change that now. She threw it away from her into the underbrush.

He laughed a wet, gurgling laugh. It clearly hurt.

"Daddy said no guns, so that means no guns, right? Your brother and sister are dead because they followed the rules. He's belly up in the lake and she's just lyin' out there in the fields. But this way you can still tell yourself

everything was above board." He'd killed the pawns, but now she was in checkmate.

He shook his head, then winced. He grabbed the back of his skull. Blood oozed through his fingers.

Would Mama and Daddy be pleased? This had been their idea . . . well, it had been Daddy's, but Mama hadn't argued. She never did. She'd had a year to change the will after Daddy died. A year to give her children a chance at a happy ending. A future where they could be brothers and sisters together.

But changing the will meant deciding who got and who didn't—leaving the farm to *someone* was more of a decision than she could bear.

It was a year of them all knowing the truth. The Eldest Son would win. He would get everything, but Mama wouldn't be around to see the carnage left behind.

But now, towering over her older brother, the Youngest Daughter couldn't help but wonder if her parents would be pleased that they'd all followed the rules, or if they would try and change course when the Eldest hadn't won as planned.

Their goal would be accomplished. There were no legal battles. There were no broken relationships. Someone would win, and the others would lose. They'd all agreed, after all.

The Youngest Daughter glanced in the direction of the shotgun. The Eldest Brother seemed to be struggling for consciousness.

She couldn't help it—she hoped, in the end, that Mama and Daddy would be pleased. Proud. She brought down the jawbone.

And she brought it down again.

It was by the early morning light that the Youngest Daughter began her descent down the mountain.

Stewardship

ETHAN MCBEE | VERMONT

A lively man on the internet once shouted
A rather unsettling fact:
"Every spider you've ever relocated
[with a cup and a piece of paper
that better be unimportant
because you always recycle the paper right
before washing your hands
even though you didn't actually
touch anything, but, you know,
it's good to be on the safe side]
Died a terrible, miserable death."

Self-righteousness shattered.

On the trail through the forest
A beetle as big as a wristwatch
Ends up in our three-year-old's hand.
Plucked right out of the air.
He looks at us wide-eyed
Unsure of what move to make next.

Inside us, suppressed screams of terror.
But we catch our breath, smile at him, and clap.

"So tickles!" he says.

As the confused insect takes flight.
We wave our goodbye
Sure to thank Mr. Beetle
For letting us walk through his home.

The Bone Collector

ALEXA BECKSTEIN | VERMONT

"All day she plays...with the bones of the world" - from Sylvia Plath's "Female Author"

There has always been The Great Mother, and because there has always been The Great Mother, there has always been The Bone Collector. Not her inverse but her echo, or so say those who walk the earth while they still retain their flesh.

At the dawning of everything, The Bone Collector witnessed the first act of creation by The Great Mother's hand.

The Great Mother threw open her mighty arms and before them stood a lamb, which bleated and blinked its enormous eyes. Time passed, it was of no meaning to the pair. The Bone Collector watched in rapture as the little lamb grew alight with energy, running through the boundless splendor of vitality too quickly into old age and, confoundingly soon, collapsing—decaying and mingling with what would become dirt.

The Great Mother did not see this dissolution, for she was already caressing valleys into existence, susurrant fields, and trees ripe with fruit.

The Bone Collector wept alone.

And so The Great Mother created and so The Bone Collector watched, tasked with witnessing each inexplicable and effervescent imagination take its first form, and then its dying breath or spark or thought, until fading into ultimate oblivion. Each astonishing thing, gone far before The Bone Collector could understand why, or could mourn.

She was not envious of The Great Mother, however, for she knew nothing else.

The Great Mother moved through the world with fingers of gold and made and made and made, leaving The Other to follow, always behind, always watching, grieving, clutching at the remnants of what was once beautiful.

Eternities slipped by, marked only by The Bone Collector's memory and misery until one day she could not stand it anymore and she sought out The Great Mother to plead for mercy.

"Great Mother, I cannot watch as each of your creations fall, I can no longer bear witness to that which is beautiful as it turns from bloom of youth to rot and rust until nothing remains. I cannot make sense of it all, if all is meant to disappear into obscurity. Please tell me why I must contain these histories, these small and innumerable endings."

"Oh, dear Bone Collector," said the Great Mother, "I fear I have neglected you in all these endless eons of creation. Who said you were no less a creator than I? Who tasked you with loving only until something goes to the ground?"

The Bone Collector reached up to touch her soft cheeks. No one told her she could cry.

"Could I salvage the wreckage?" asked The Bone Collector, the question the closest she'd ever come to prayer. "Could I go back?"

"There is no back," The Great Mother said. "There is only Now."

"Oh – oh."

The Bone Collector, understanding, turned from The Great Mother, inhaled, and then pushed through the membrane of temporality, past and future rippling around her in a cool breeze. Time stretched before The Bone Collector, malleable and alive.

At peace now, she reached out, gently, and touched the wing of a sparrow as it soared high above golden fields. Beyond, in the distance to which she was headed, she saw nothingness disturbed only by the outline of two figures and then, suddenly, a lamb.

And so, The Bone Collector began her work, liberated from the shackles of linear time and the burden of memory. She leapt back and forth through the centuries as the years cascaded and whorled past her, looking for the cobwebs and the crumbs, for mauve modernity and for all that is to come.

She watched the moment of the first creation which was also the genesis of death; she watched as Eve sunk her teeth into the pure flesh of the apple, as the world flooded and Vishnu came back bearing the ship of salvation, as Minokawa swallowed whole the blazing umber of the sun; she swam through rivers of song and the memories of all that is dead, most of which is not even yet born; she pocketed ash from the remains of Alexandria's great fire, the lost words on the blackened pages no more important than the floating dust they created; she pulled femurs from the graves of medicine women and finger bones from emperors' tombs, but she left the children untouched, taking with her only their too-small stones; she curled in between her fingers the first laugh of a baby, and then that same baby's dying breath, eighty-two years later; she swallowed the atoms of dying stars and drank the pain of elephants mourning

in deserts, weeping as they buried their dead, and then she took their dead with her, too; she lapped up spilt milk, dug for lost treasure, resurrected every circus animal that died in that once-infamous Berlin train crash; pyramids were erected and demolished throughout the centuries—she held them all in her; she gathered amoebas, the letters of war widows, plastic soda bottles from the Great Pacific Garbage Patch; prehistoric mammals never to be known to mankind, lurking in the muck of the ocean's bottom; she was there, swimming with them too; she was at the Second Porpoise War of 1463, collecting salty tears of those who lost and were lost; so too was she there the year the monarchs did not migrate, the year the Nile truly did turn red as blood, the year all the goats went missing from three small towns in Myanmar. Bicycles and shoestrings, yellow trout lilies, and noble white stags, melting popsicles and wisps of colored light streaming through the stained glass windows of a church that had been desecrated two centuries prior; a silver shard of mirror, a tree frog, some tax exemption forms in a decrepit filing cabinet, the last slice of cake; and bodies everywhere; maiming each other, touching with soft breath, jumping into lakes, drowning in endlessly self-indulgent emotion and drowning in a motel pool somewhere just south of northern Idaho.

Sometimes, she thought she saw herself out in the ether, eons earlier, swept away in the current of time, wearied and old and inconsolable as she watched another minnow's last leap into the River Lethe.

Sometimes, she almost thought she saw herself looking back, back when she did not understand that there was no back.

She bore witness. She gathered.

And so, having collected the detritus and the preciousness of it all, she did what only The Bone Collector can.

She weaved.

As the legend goes, or comes—remember, there is no back, only Now—you may find her one day on your travels, for unlike The Great Mother who is all, The Bone Collector walks amongst men, crosses canvases of deserts and perches in hickory trees.

She hangs from her web. She laments. She exalts. She works around us, sifts through the hours to find that which she seeks, drawn only by a feeling, a desire to witness, to sustain.

You may hear tell of those who feel her in dreams as her hands cup their faces like a lover here to commemorate some part of you that is already gone or is yet to be realized.

You will not see her, but when you feel that thing, that intangible omnipresence both unbearably profound and horrible in its smallness, that chasm so immense that surely you must exist beyond yourself, beyond time, know then that she is with you.

Do not fear her.

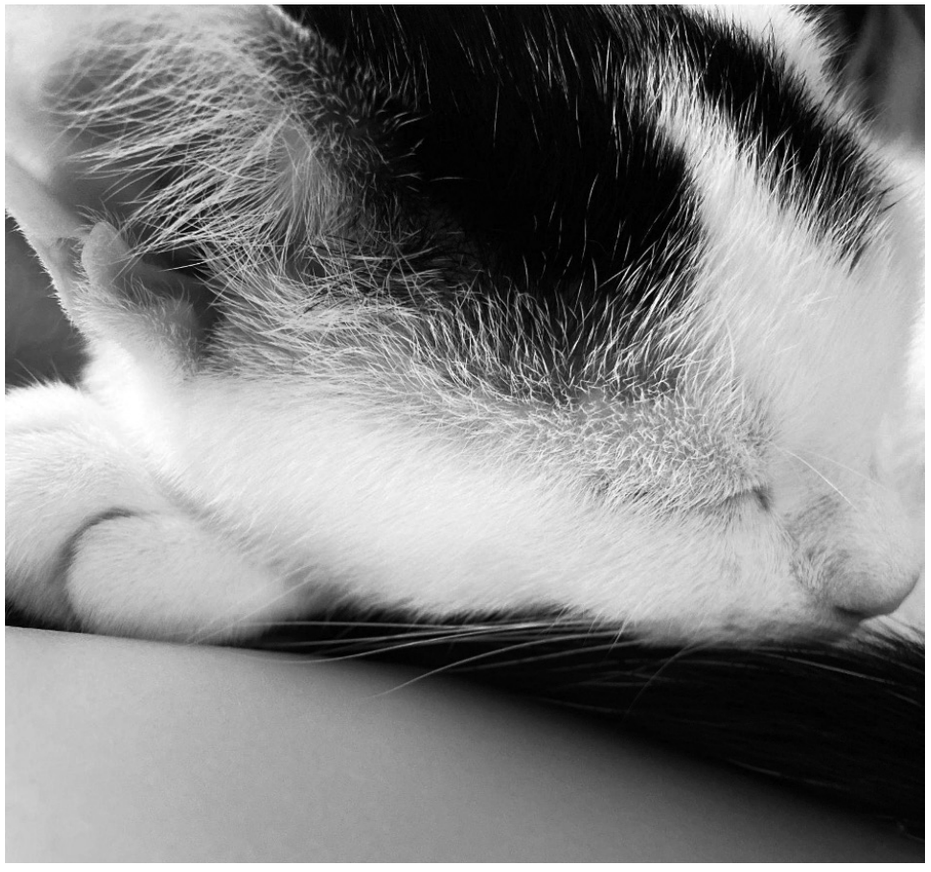
To know The Bone Collector is to commune with all that has been and all that could be, to remind us, even for a moment, that nothing is more than anything else, in that to her, everything is essential.

In some colossal cosmic heaven she sits on a front porch, rocking in a well-loved chair, as she sews together the ephemera of existence, weaving, strand by strand, the Great Mosaic of Now.

Ode to Momo

JULIA SPRAGUE | VERMONT

Behold that bug, crawling on the wall there.
Another yet I see—its ugly face
Assaults my sense of safety in this chair,
Once comfy, soft and fine. What's this? Her Grace,
My Savior, Missus Momo, feline race.
"Destroy them all," I plead and beg my knight.
At once, she hunts them so their flesh to taste:
Pounce here! Claw there! She triumphs in her fight!
She swallows whole her foe, and now all can be right.



Momo, Julia Sprague

scenic, south dakota

NICK MILLER | VERMONT

give me the things that are worn and tired
the retired cattle dogs
and baseball gloves with frayed webbing
give them to me so I can hold them firm and with a dripping heart
so i can take them to the side of the road between martin and upper cut meat
where the fields flood and you can see fine things
like swallows flying in the shape of that girl who might have really loved you
or dry flowers growing through the floorboards

give them to me so I can hold them
and show them
that dented beer cans
and faded coke-a-cola machines with rusted nickels inside
and flat gasoline
and dead car batteries
and empty shotgun shells
can be held

give them to me
so that they may all be held, still
so maybe their bad dreams
go away
so they feel less no good
give them to me
even if my hands shake from withdrawal
even if the country kept on moving
after we were thrown from cars
because we just weren't any good

give them to me

give me these things

give me the retired cattle dogs
and let me stroke their ears as they wheeze

The First Fire

SAVANNAH SKINNER | VERMONT

self portrait with no anthem

after "self portrait with no flag" by safia elhillo

WANGECI GITAU | OXFORD

1. eh mungu nguvu yetu, watoto wako wame shika assignment m y mother anapenda my whatsapp posts nikiland, reminding me of the last time she was here, huddled at heathrow overnight– two bald-headed gap-toothed kids in tow now my hair is long, and my gap is gone now my brother won't speak to me now the supreme court says it's criminal sleep outside what of our dead in the streets? ao walifanya sote bidii? walikua tayari kuilinda lakini who protected them? they refused to sleep and they were punished.

2. ngai wa mumbi and gikuyu a misty fog envelops the distance, bringing me back to the frost on my cucu's crops tukiwa ushago a week before a plane took me to a place where people didn't believe i could fly i pledge allegiance to icicles coating even the youngest of the mahindi, to the altar of muthoni back home that everyone thinks is me and the forests that kept her i pledge allegiance to naps and gaps and the right to self determination. kila siku tuwe na shukrani.

3. oh god of all creation, god of the mineral mountain & the men who mind them, i didn't realize the world belonged to me, too. tunasafiri kutoka one ass cheek of empire to the other in a luxurious coach, sasa! ata sisi tumekua inheritors of the old world walinzi wa dunia wafalme wa ulimwengu the further we get from aging spires, makanisa medieval, my stomach lulls and lurches kama meza nimeshikilia na kitabu hapo chini i pledge allegiance to the kabook holding up the table, to the rolling green hills, to the wild kaflowers on the side of t h e road we could really be anywhere na gatho ni cia ngai.

shitting bricks

MISAO MCGREGOR | CALIFORNIA

CHARACTERS

CLEA 28. Chase's twin. Asian American. Fiery and not to be fucked with. Any pronouns.

CHASE 28. Clea's twin. Asian American. Can be convinced not to be fucked with. Any pronouns.

Clea sits on a bed with a mirror in hand. Watching their reflection, they lift their chin up and pucker their lips, making an INSANE sucking sound. Chase enters the bedroom and watches.

CHASE

What the fuck are you doing? /

CLEA

Oh my god—shut the fucking door!

CHASE

Jesus, you're in a mood.

CLEA

Is it possible for you to be in here without talking? Because that would be great.

CHASE

What the fuck jumped up your butt? This is my room, too!

CLEA

Only because Mom and Dad decided to make your room into a home office. Slash gym. Slash meditation center—you know, they've really gone off the

deep end with this whole remodel.

CHASE

It's called empty nesting.

Clea returns to their exercises.

CHASE (CON'T)

So, you gonna answer my original question?

CLEA

What question?

CHASE

What the fuck are you doing?

CLEA

Oh, it's this exercise I found on Google—it's supposed to help the skin around your chin and neck tighten up and make you look thinner /

CHASE

Jesus Christ /

CLEA

Hey! This is a no judgment zone /

CHASE

Fine, but I don't know why you're being so /

CLEA

Why? *Why??* /

CHASE

Here we go /

CLEA

Does our ten-year high school reunion ring a bell to you? You know, the one that's supposed to happen in *literally three hours?*

CHASE

Oh yeah, the one you haven't shut up about!

CLEA

How are you not more invested in this reunion than me?!

CHASE

Why should I be?

CLEA

Does it mean absolutely nothing to you that we're about to confront the bullies we dealt with in high school? The ones who called us Siamese twins, two fat peas in a dumpling pod, and slanted their eyes at us? /

CHASE

I know what they did /

CLEA

Then why aren't you taking this seriously? I was talking to my therapist and she said this is our chance to, you know, reclaim our power back from all those racist assholes.

CHASE

You don't think just living our best life is revenge enough?

CLEA

Chase, seriously! I mean, do you really expect me to believe that you've entirely moved on from what happened to us back then? I know we were raised never to fight back but, we're adults now. We know better than to let that shit slide.

CHASE

It was a long time ago, Clea.

CLEA

So you've just moved on completely. Is that it?

CHASE

Yes, actually. I have. And I'm much happier letting all that shit go.

CLEA

Hmm. Like . . . how happy?

CHASE

Like, shit-eating grin happy.

CLEA

But like . . . happy as a clam? Or like seventh-heaven happy? /

CHASE

Shit, I don't know, Clea, just really fucking happy /

CLEA

Okay, okay, I was just curious, jeez . . . . So like, if I said . . . *(muttering)* brick on the basketball court . . .

CHASE

. . . What?

CLEA

Like . . . .Hypothetically . . . if I was to say / brick on the

CHASE

Don't say that shit again /

CLEA

You wouldn't fucking lose it? /

CHASE

Why the fuck would you /

CLEA

'Cause you're so fucking happy right? /

CHASE

It doesn't matter. None of it does /

CLEA

So it doesn't remind you of the time / that you went in for a slam dunk then landed on your butt and everyone called you brick because you made a dent on the blacktop?

CHASE

Don't / don't do this—Clea, I'm literally going to kill you. Why the fuck would you—just stop—the dent was already there!!! That blacktop hadn't been paved over in years!! It was filled with cracks and shit and I didn't fucking dent the blacktop, okay?!?!

Beat.

CLEA

So . . . shit-eating grin happy, huh?

CHASE

Give me that!

Chase lunges for the mirror and begins doing Clea's exercises.

CLEA

Oh my god, you're gonna fucking hurt yourself /

CHASE

Am I even doing this right?

CLEA

Wait it's more like a—

Clea puckers. Chase copies her.

CHASE

God! It's no use! /

CLEA

You just have to trust the process /

CHASE

For how long?

CLEA

Okay, what are your plans for the next 20 minutes? /

CHASE

God!

Chase throws the mirror against a piece of cloth. But the mirror cracks.

CHASE (CON'T)

What the . . .

CLEA

How did you /

CHASE

I don't know I –

Clea lifts the cloth to reveal a stack of bricks.

CLEA

Oh my / god

CHASE

Un-fucking-believable /

CLEA

Okay, wait. Chase. I have *never* witnessed the magic of manifestation quite like this /

CHASE

Are you serious, Clea?! /

CLEA

That was magic. *You* are magic /

CHASE

It's a fucking coincidence! Probably where they're keeping extra materials for the remodel /

CLEA

But we didn't know it was here until /

CHASE

I get it! I know! Just like a fucking punch to the face. God!

CLEA

Wait. That's it.

CHASE

What do you mean that's it?

CLEA

This is how we're gonna get them back.

CHASE

What—you want to fucking assault people with bricks at our high school reunion?

CLEA

God no! I'm not a psychopath! /

CHASE

Thank God.

CLEA

We're gonna hit each *other* with them /

CHASE

What!! /

CLEA

Don't you get it? Obviously, we can't go bashing other people in the face with bricks. But what if we showed up just as bruised and battered as they made us

feel in high school? What if *they* finally had to confront the harm and violence they inflicted on us?

CHASE

Clea . . . you have officially gone insane.

Beat.

CLEA

I can't even imagine how hurt you were from what happened to us in high school. I mean, we hardly ever talked about it while it was happening. But there's no way that you can look me in the eye and tell me there's not just one little part of you that wants those fuckers to see exactly what they did to us—how they made us feel—and how we're still having to recover from it.

CHASE

I don't know, Clea. It's risky.

CLEA

Things that are worth it are rarely ever safe.

CHASE

Is it crazy that I'm actually considering doing this with you?

CLEA

I don't think so.

CHASE

But you're my twin. You're supposed to say that.

CLEA

The bricks didn't appear until after you manifested them. Throwing that mirror? That wasn't a coincidence. It was fate.

CHASE

Fuck, my armpits are starting to sweat.

CLEA

Ew—why?

CHASE

Because . . . I think I'm about to say yes /

CLEA

Oh my god. You are??

Chase picks up two bricks and hands Clea one of them.

CHASE

Okay. On the count of three. Ready? One...

CLEA

Two . . .

CHASE & CLEA

Three!

Blackout.

South of Benson on 22A

TRISH DOUGHERTY | VERMONT

I pass a farm that wraps their hay bales in American flag netting. Gigantic rolls of postage stamps scattered as if fallen from the hand of some behemoth postmaster. This field a love letter writ large: writ to life itself in clumps of uncut goldenrod and wheeling redtails diving at tiny scavengers. My heart clenches o'er these Americana bales because I don't know, can't tell from the context provided, which way the farmer votes. If the sky was not so cornflower blue I might remember how forever stamps have been tainted and tasked carrying bombs to professors, carrying anthrax to senators, from those with ingenuity and a post office. South of Benson on 22A I want to allow myself a glorious sun-drenched Norman Rockwell moment to roll out the radical empathy for this farm, this Republican county, this Democratic state, these United States; to send them all a love letter wrapped in red, white, and blue.

Upon Hearing About His Cambodian Grandmother

ARIANNA VAILAS |VERMONT

Unremembered grief
unfurled—

to grieve what I hadn't lost:
my grandmother
the smells of garlic in the kitchen
of stories crowded into a living room
of laughter and lemon-chicken and plastic over the furniture
and all the kids and all their dirty shoes
and all five sons together with their father—

I mourned a world impossible.

One in which my Yiayia made us spanakopita
and all the parts were still together,
like *his* family, whole—
like my father's
never was.

How do we fill these spaces?
How do we hold
them?

What bruises we press—
what unfelt tendernesses ache beyond
a world unseen.

Closing remarks:

The summer began with a racially motivated hate crime that affected the Bread Loaf community. We got through it with the help of art and words. We made signs that expressed our indignation and hung them from the school with blue tape. Our joyful act of defiance was monitored and ultimately protected by an abundance of campus security who wanted to make sure "things didn't get out of line."[1] We kept our bachata music at the softest possible volume.

As the summer melted on, we called for student poetry and prose. The submissions came rolling in, and certain themes emerged, notably grief, death, loss. A lot of bones. This was expressed through a cacophony of voices and languages informed by different traditions and different root words other than English. Punctuation became expressive and creative. Ample spaces breathed between lines, between words. Slashes conveyed rage or silence. This issue proved that poetry could be polyphonic.

Let us disrupt the legacy of conquest and colonialism encoded in this language we love. Let us continue to make art and words that bring us together while still noting our differences. Let us heal.

—Serena Kim, Coeditor

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[1]Louis: Let's make sure this is fair. Reporting only the facts that fit the impression you want to create isn't fair, even if the selected tidbits you report are technically factual. If you want to talk about what campus security did in relation to this event, you have to recount the conversations I had with them (100% supportive and protective), the concerns they wanted to be on top of in terms of potential threats from outside campus, and that they rallied to make sure Vermont State Police made it a priority. If you want to talk about how "we" got through (with care not to co-opt my story), you have to talk about how a team of White people, spurred on by a gifted Black professor who was able to posit a single masterful query during a community moment—volunteered to keep an overnight watch of my house so that I could sleep. The banners and music were a wonderful, heartening, and vital component, but those actions of protection were at the core.

Middlebury Bread Loaf
School *of* English